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The Notion of ‘Qi Yun’ (Spirit Consonance) in Chinese Painting

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ABSTRACT. ‘Spirit consonance engendering a sense of life’ (Qi Yun Sheng Dong) as the first law of Chinese painting, originally proposed by Xie He (active 500–535?) in his six laws of painting, has been commonly echoed by numerous later Chinese artists up to this day. Tracing back the meaning of each character of ‘Qi Yun Sheng Dong’ from Pre-Qin up to the Six Dynasties, along with a comparative analysis on the renderings of ‘Qi Yun Sheng Dong’ by experts in Western academia, I establish ‘spirit consonance’ as the rendering of ‘Qi Yun’. By examining texts on painting by significant critics in Chinese art history, and by referring to specific works by painters from the Six Dynasties up to the Yuan Dynasty, I present the merits and demerits of the different interpretations by Western experts, and explore the essence of ‘Qi Yun’. Once the painter successfully captures ‘spirit consonance’ as the essential character or ‘internal reality’ of the object, and transmits it into the work, ‘Qi Yun’ further implies the expressive quality of the work beyond formal representation. Additionally, the fusion of expressive and representative functions also leaves space for further explaining the aesthetic interaction among artist, object, work, and audience. From the Six Dynasties onwards, Chinese painters have practised the expressive pursuit beyond representation on the basis of the unification of ‘Qi Yun’ (spirit consonance) and formal representation, although spirit consonance was valued more highly than formal likeness.

1. Introduction

In the writing of Han Fei (233 B.C, ECTOP: 24), a painter claimed that ‘dogs and horses are most difficult to paint’ but ‘demons and goblins’ are the easiest, and the reason for this is that the former are common and visible things whose representation demands a higher standard of formal

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likeness, while the latter are invisible things that painters can depict following their imagination. Although this seems to be the earliest evidence that the importance of formal imitation was emphasized in the artistic practice of ancient China, formal imitation is not the first aim for ancient Chinese painters. 'Qi Yun Sheng Dong' (spirit consonance engendering a sense of life) as the first law of Chinese painting, had been established since the Six Dynasties, by Xie He (active 500–535?) in his six laws of painting, where the law of 'correspondence to the object in depicting forms' (Ying Wu Xiang Xing) was postulated as the third level.¹ 'Qi Yun Sheng Dong' as the first and essential standard of Chinese painting has been echoed by numerous later Chinese artists during a long history. Even some contemporary masters of Chinese painting still inherit this great tradition.

Concerning 'Qi Yun Sheng Dong', experts in Western academia such as Alexander C. Soper, William Acker, James Cahill, Wen Fong, and Max Loehr offered valuable contributions towards an appropriate translation, in spite of the fact that their respective renderings are based on different interpretations. It is worth noting possible discrepancies: 'Qi Yun' might refer to (i) the character of the object depicted, which is captured and transmitted by painters beyond form, or (ii) the expressive quality or content of a work, or (iii) an innate talent which an ideal painter should possess, or (iv) the artistic style of a work, or (v) the aesthetic interaction among artist, object, work and audience.

The notion of 'Qi Yun' seems to be very hard to clarify since it implies several possibilities. Based on these different interpretations, there are various translations of 'Qi Yun Sheng Dong' in Western academia. Alexander C. Soper (1949: 414–423) argued against five translations by previous interpreters, and established that 'Qi Yun Sheng Dong' means 'Animation

¹ Xie He's Six Laws for Chinese painting: The first law 'Qi Yun Sheng Dong' means engendering a sense of life through spirit consonance; the second law 'Gu Fa Yong Bi' refers to using the brush with the 'bone method' (which is unique for Chinese painting); the third law 'Ying Wu Xiang Xing' refers to correspondence to the object in depicting forms or depicting forms corresponding to things; the fourth law 'Sui Lei Fu Cai' means conformity to type in applying colours or applying colours according to the kind of objects; the fifth law 'Jing Ying Wei Zhi' refers to dividing, planning, positioning and arranging (the composition); the sixth law 'Chuan Yi Mo Xie' means transmitting and conveying earlier models through copying. These translations are mainly based on Alexander C. Soper (1949) and James F. Cahill (1961).

through spirit consonance'.² 'Qi Yun' as 'sympathetic responsiveness of the vital spirit', is rendered as 'spirit consonance' to keep it simple; 'spirit consonance' (Qi Yun) engenders the effect of 'animation' or 'life-motion' (Sheng Dong). Soper's rendering appears to suggest that painters should capture the essential quality of the object and transmit it in the work of art. William Acker (1954: xxxiii) translated 'Qi Yun Sheng Dong' as 'Spirit resonance, means vitality'. Acker suggested a new punctuation and grammatical analysis: the former two characters 'Qi Yun' and the latter two characters 'Sheng Dong' are separate two-word phrases which share the same meaning, so spirit resonance (Qi Yun) means vitality (Sheng Dong). Additionally, Acker regarded 'Qi Yun' as an ability which an ideal painter should possess: during the creation of a painting, a painter should stimulate himself into a state of being filled with vital energy ('Qi') and 'remain vibrant with energy' in order to enable his work to 'show evidence of this power and vitality' and to demonstrate a sense of life. James Cahill (1961: 372–381) argued against Acker's punctuation, and insisted that 'Qi Yun Sheng Dong' is still a four-word phrase, which means 'Engender a sense of movement through spirit consonance'. In Cahill's mind, 'spirit consonance' ('Qi Yun') appears to be an aesthetic attribute shown in a successful work of art. Wen Fong (1966: 159–164) offered another new illustration: 'Qi' (breath/vitality) and 'Yun' (resonance/harmony) refer to 'the vital essence of creation' and 'the harmonious manner of execution' in a work respectively, and 'aliveness' or 'life-motion' (Sheng Dong) appears to the effect of 'Qi' and 'Yun'. Max Loehr (1973: 68–69) seems to agree with Acker's punctuation, but treated the grammatical function of the two binomial terms 'Qi Yun' and 'Sheng Dong' as two nouns; so, according to Loehr, 'Qi Yun Sheng Dong' means 'spirit resonance or vitality'. What makes his translation distinct from Acker is that Loehr appears to suggest 'Qi Yun' as the expressive quality or content of a work rather than a personal attribute or spiritual state of an ideal painter as Acker thought.

These renderings contributed a great deal to the understanding of 'Qi

² Five previous translations of 'Qi Yun Sheng Dong' cited by Soper: Rhythmic vitality (Giles); Spiritual element, life's motion (Hirth); Through a vitalizing spirit, a painting should possess the movement of life (Sakanishi); Resonance of the spirit, movement of life (Siren); Spiritual tone and life-movement (Taki Seiichi). Sakanishi's rendering clearly shows that 'Qi Yun Sheng Dong' is understood as the quality of an artwork.

Yun Sheng Dong'. My interpretation will be based on the comparative examination of relevant ideas proposed by Western academia. After exploring the meanings of 'Qi' and 'Yun' from Pre-Qin, Han up to the Six Dynasties respectively, I will confirm the meaning and rendering of 'Qi Yun' and 'Sheng Dong' as two two-character phrases and I will examine the issue of punctuating 'Qi Yun Sheng Dong'; finally I will establish the rendering of 'Qi Yun Sheng Dong'. Additionally, I will explore the essence of 'Qi Yun' in the process of examining the merits and demerits of the different suggestions by previous experts. Based on the comparative analysis of previous renderings, I will review artistic texts about 'Qi Yun' by significant critics in Chinese art history, and I will carefully examine specific works by painters from the Six Dynasties up to the Yuan Dynasty. I tend to agree that there are more plausible points in the analyses of Xie He's first law by James Cahill and Alexander C. Soper; these establish 'spirit consonance' as the rendering of 'Qi Yun', and confirm the rendering of 'Qi Yun Sheng Dong' to be 'spirit consonance engendering a sense of life'. Merely confining the scope of 'Qi Yun' to that of the painter, or the object, or the work alone appears to be unreasonable. Once the painter successfully captures 'spirit consonance' as the 'internal reality' of the object and transmits it into the work by means of ink and brush to release his image of mind on silk or paper, 'Qi Yun' (spirit consonance) further implies the expressive content or quality of the work beyond formal representation.

2. 'Qi'

Firstly, the original and essential meaning of 'Qi' in Chinese ancient philosophy and literature need to be explored.

'Qi' could be translated as 'vapour' or 'steam' or 'breath' or 'exhalation' or 'emanation' or 'aura' or 'energy', or 'nervous energy' or 'vital energy' or 'life-spirit', or 'spirit', etc. Concerning the rendering of 'Qi' as spirit, I feel that both Soper and Acker contributed valuable insights. The biggest difference between these two experts relies in the controversy whether 'Qi' as spirit only exists in animate things or pervades everything (animate and inanimate). Soper insisted on the former, while Acker claimed the latter.

According to Soper (1949: 418), in Chinese ancient philosophy of nature, Qi as 'a universal concept' could refer to the fundamental quality of

everything that is animate, as vital energy gives life to humans and to any other sentient beings. Rendering 'Qi' as physical breath of human beings merely discloses its most basic connotation, while the translation of 'Qi' as 'spirit' seems to disclose its 'passion-nature' and 'psychological concept' (Soper, 1949: 418). Since 'Qi Yun' and 'Shen Yun' share a similar meaning and sometimes could replace one another, Soper (1949: 420) claimed that the kinship of 'Shen in the sense of soul' and 'Qi as vital spirit' is just 'like the kinship of psyche and nous'. Although Soper insisted that 'Qi' only resides in sentient beings, Acker (1954: xxix) recognised that 'Qi' might exist in any animate and inanimate thing as 'life-spirit', which appears to be a kind of 'electricity-like fluid' or aura flowing pervasively and mysteriously inside everything in the universe. For human beings and animals, 'Qi' as 'spirit' seems to be a kind of 'nervous energy', 'the electricity-like nerve-currents within the body', while for inanimate things 'Qi' also functions as electricity-like energy which could flow or be transmitted from or to animate things (Acker, 1954: xxix-xxx). This may sound superstitious, but it corresponds to Chinese ancient philosophy and even modern Chinese ideas.

To explore the original philosophical meaning of 'Qi', Acker appears more convincing by tracing it back to Guanzi, who offered a complete theoretical explanation about 'Qi' as the essence of everything that exists. Body and mind are pervaded by and filled with 'Qi' as life-spirit, benefiting from its nurturing or suffering from its pollution (Guanzi, cited by Acker, 1949: xxx-xxxi). Acker emphasises 'Qi' as the fountain of life energy which could be accumulated, cultivated 'under conscious control' and transmitted between different media (from animate things to inanimate things; 1954: xxxi).

Both Acker and Soper traced back the meaning of 'Qi' before the Han dynasty. By examining the adoption of 'Qi' in literature and art after the Han dynasty, Wen Fong (1966: 160) offered his distinctive translation of 'Qi' as 'vitality', regarding it as 'vital creative force' or 'vital essence of creation', determining the aesthetic attribute of a work. 'Qi' as the 'moving force' is the 'master of literature', according to Cao Pi (189-226), a leading critic and first emperor of the Wei dynasty (cited by Fong, 1966: 159). Similarly, in the commentary book of poetry during the Six Dynasties *Shi Pin* by Zhong Rong (468-518), 'Qi' is demonstrated as the moving force

of agitating objects and then further stirring humans' feelings and emotions, which would be expressed in artistic actions such as dances, songs or poems. This could also be found in the literary critical work *Wen Xin Diao Long* by Liu Xie (465–522): 'Qi' appears to determine one's 'personal inclinations', 'temperament and nature', and further acts as the dominating force that determines one's language style and literary expression effect (cited by Fong, 1966: 159). Due to the function of 'Qi' influencing writing style and quality, the nurturing, cultivation and adjustment of 'Qi' as the 'vital creative force' is significant for literature, so artists should keep 'Qi' 'harmonious and freely circulating' (Liu Xie, cited by Wen Fong, 1966: 159–160). Generally, Fong (1966: 160) focuses on the function of 'Qi' as the moving force in poetry, literature, and painting, and claims that 'Qi' constitutes 'the substance of a work'.

In general, after examining the meaning of 'Qi' from the pre-Qin Dynasties up until the Six Dynasties, the rendering of 'Qi' as spirit seems the most convincing. 'Qi' could constitute everything, appearing like a basic universal cosmic unit or force which conveys energy or spirit to everything. 'Qi' existing in inanimate things appears to demonstrate an anthropomorphic power. For the sake of simplicity, I follow Soper and Acker, and select 'spirit' as the best translation for 'Qi'.

3. 'Yun'

After establishing the rendering of 'Qi', the meaning and rendering of 'Yun' will be explored in a similar way. Although 'Yun' appears later than 'Qi', 'Yun' could also be translated in many ways: 'tone', 'overtone', 'corresponding tone', 'rhyme', 'consonance', 'harmony', 'sympathetic vibration', 'resonance', and so on.

The meaning of 'Yun' originates in music. 'When differing sounds are in mutual accord, one speaks of Ho (Peace); when notes of the same key respond to one another, one speaks of Yun (harmony)' (Liu Xie, 465–522, cited by Soper, 1949: 419–420). Since 'Yun' originally refers to the harmony of sounds, as described by Liu Xie in his *Wen Xin Diao Long*, Soper opts for the translation of 'Yun' as 'harmony' or 'concord' or 'consonance'. 'Yun' as consonance (the opposite of discordance), does not confine its use to the scope of sound. In *Shi Shuo Xin Yu* which is a collection of anecdotes

by distinctive literati in the Six Dynasties, the meaning of 'Yun' as 'consonance' could refer to the elegance, purity, loveliness or superiority of 'human personality', or personal 'manner and bearing' (Soper, 1949: 419–420). Up to this day, in the practice of Chinese classic dancing, the training of the 'Yun' of body is emphasized in order to cultivate and perfectly demonstrate the elegance of body and the harmony of its movement. However, although Xie He's law might initially and mainly refer to figure painting in the Six Dynasties, Soper (1949: 420) did not believe that 'Yun' in figure painting is confined to human qualities. When tracing back to *the Book of Changes*, especially the first hexagram in it, Soper (1949: 421) believes that the idea of *the Book of Changes* heavily influenced the meaning of 'Yun' (the 'power of mystical correspondences and sympathies'), and established 'Yun' as 'sympathetic response' to 'Qi' of every animate thing in the universe. To verify this, Soper (1949: 421) cites Confucius's explanation of the first hexagram: 'Notes of the same key respond to one another; creatures of the same nature, Qi, seek one another. Thus water flows down toward wetness, while fire aspires toward dryness; clouds follow the dragon, and winds the tiger. The sage appears, and all things look to him. All that has its origin in Heaven is drawn upward; all that has its origin in Earth is drawn downward; everything follows its kind'. In order to keep the translation simple, Soper's final suggestion for 'Yun' is 'consonance'. Tracing back the first hexagram appears convincing in terms of exploring the meaning of 'Yun', although the understanding of 'Yun' by Soper is consistent with his understanding of 'Qi' in the scope of animate things.

The rendering as 'harmony' is very close to consonance. Along with 'Qi', tracing the use of 'Yun' in literature during the Six Dynasties, Wen Fong (1966: 160–161) suggested the translation of 'Yun' as 'harmony' and regarded 'Yun' as the harmonious or elegant manner of execution in an artwork. When reviewing the meaning and use of 'Yun' in *Wen Xin Diao Long* and critical texts about painting, Fong focuses on 'Yun' as harmonious or graceful manner, the result being that of stylistic demonstration in literature. According to Liu Xie (465–522), 'Yun' as the manifestation of 'Qi' determines the beauty or ugliness of literal expression or plastic representation (cited by Fong, 1966: 159). Fong (1966: 160) concludes that if 'Qi' dominates the expressive content ('substance') of a work, 'Yun' dominates the manner of execution 'in which the substance is expressed'; both

'Qi' and 'Yun' control artistic style. When citing the meaning of 'Yun' as 'the consonant response of words of the same tone' and the connotation of 'He' as 'the harmony of words of different sounds' from *Wen Xin Diao Long*, Fong (1961: 161) illustrates the significance of 'Yun' as the harmonious manner of execution by resorting to the six defects in tones and rhymes in poetry. By citing remarks on painting by several critics, Fong (1966: 160–162) is at pains to show 'Yun' as the graceful and 'distinguished manner of representation', appearing to be the synonym for 'Ya' (elegance), and thus constituting the 'felicitous expression' of 'Qi' as 'the vital creative force'.

Acker rendered 'Yun' as 'resonance' (1954, xxxi–xxxiii). According to Acker, being consistent with the view that the commander of 'Qi' in painting ultimately refers to painters, 'Yun' was regarded as 'lingering resonance or overtone' for the painters who command 'Qi' (Acker, 1954: xxxii). Acker (1954: xxxii) notes that 'Yun' could be explained as 'sympathetic vibration' or 'conveyance' of 'Qi' (spirit) between the painter and the audience by virtue of the work of art as medium. Acker (1954: xxxii) also points out that 'Yun' could be rendered as consonance to indicate the state in which the painter gets in tune with the object depicted and releases the brush until 'a definite rapport has been established'. However, Acker (1954: xxxiii) rejects these explanations of 'Yun' without any further argument, selecting 'resonance' as the rendering of 'Yun', to refer to the transferring or 'conveyance' of 'Qi' from the painter to his work.

The painter and critic Zong Bing (375–443) once claimed that he wanted the rhythm and melody of mountains in a painting to be resonant or vibrant with the music one might perform in front of a landscape painting. There appears to be no reason for denying that 'Yun' could exist as sympathetic vibration or resonance between the painter and the object of representation, the work and the audience, the painter and the audience. The rendering of 'Yun' as consonance not only reflects its quality of harmony in music, human manners, natural scenery and artworks, but also adequately covers the possibilities of harmonious sympathetic agreement among the painter, the object, the work, and the audience.

4. 'Sheng Dong'

'Sheng' as a verb, means 'engender' or 'produce', and 'Dong' as a noun, means 'animation' or 'movement'. If 'Sheng Dong' is regarded to be a verb phrase comprising a verb and noun, then its meaning would be 'engender animation', or 'engender a sense of movement'. However, 'Sheng Dong' could also be thought of as a noun phrase, which means 'animation' or 'vitality'. The grammatical property and meaning of 'Sheng Dong' depends on determining the punctuation of 'Qi Yun Sheng Dong'. Concerning the punctuation of 'Qi Yun Sheng Dong', there is intense debate. Traditionally, 'Qi Yun Sheng Dong' is treated as an indivisible four-character phrase, and this tradition draws from the Tang critic Zhang Yanyuan. The original sentence of Xie He's first law was punctuated as: 'Yi, Qi Yun Sheng Dong Shi Ye'. 'Yi' means 'firstly'; 'Shi Ye' has no meaning, functions as an indicative term of definition, and here suggests 'Qi Yun Sheng Dong' is the first law. However, Acker's (1954, xxii-xxviii) punctuation for Xie He's first law is: 'Yi, Qi Yun, Sheng Dong Shi Ye'. Acker's punctuation derives from the claim that 'Qi Yun' and 'Sheng Dong' are two separate two-character phrases and the latter phrase follows and explains the former. That is, for Acker, 'Shi Ye' follows 'Sheng Dong', works as a noun phrase, and still functions as the indicative term of definition, explaining 'Sheng Dong'. Thus, the first law was construed by Acker: first, 'spirit resonance' means 'vitality'. Acker's rendering is very controversial, but it has been echoed by some critics such as Max Loehr (1973) and Qian Zhongshu (1979), although there might be differences of interpretation among those who accept the punctuation advocated by Acker.

Before Acker, Soper and previous experts agreed with the traditional punctuation of Xie He's first law. In Soper's (1949: 422-423) mind, 'Sheng Dong' means animation, and it is the 'reward' or effect of 'spirit consonance' (Qi Yun); so, 'Qi Yun Sheng Dong' was translated as 'animation through spirit consonance'. Cahill (1961: 372) shares a similar view on the meaning of 'Qi Yun Sheng Dong' with Soper by confessing that Soper's interpretation of the first two laws of Xie He offers 'the soundest' exposition. Concerning the punctuation of 'Qi Yun Sheng Dong', I tend to agree with James Cahill's argument against Acker, and accept Cahill's confirmation of 'Sheng Dong' as a verb phrase. As Cahill (1961: 374) interprets, 'Shi Ye'

could function as a connective between the number and the four-character phrase. On the basis of the complete and comprehensive analyses on the six laws of Xie He, Cahill convincingly argues against Acker's punctuation and insists that 'Qi Yun' and 'Sheng Dong' could not be regarded as two-character compounds which share the same meaning, in order to keep the logical consistency among each one of the six laws in terms of grammatical structure. According to Cahill (1961: 380), 'Sheng Dong' means 'engendering a sense of movement', and 'Qi Yun Sheng Dong' means 'engendering a sense of movement through spirit consonance'.

My rendering is a little bit different from Cahill, by considering the fact that a sense of movement is actually a demonstration of a sense of life: 'Sheng Dong' is better rendered as 'engendering a sense of life'. As suggested in the previous section, 'Qi Yun' is confirmed as 'spirit consonance', so the rendering of 'Qi Yun Sheng Dong' can be now conveyed as 'spirit consonance engendering a sense of life'.

5. The Essence of 'Qi Yun'

Concerning the essence of 'Qi Yun', previous experts' opinions seem to merely care about one aspect, in spite of offering valuable points in different aspects. The merits and shortcomings of those accounts need to be examined one by one in the process of tracing back to the writings of significant art critics after Xie He, along with examining artworks from the Six Dynasties up to the Yuan Dynasty.

In Wen Fong's (1986: 160/162–164) mind, following the Tang critic Zhang Yanyuan's comments on the six laws by Xie He, 'Qi Yun' (in contrast with formal likeness) appears to refer to the aesthetic quality of the artwork, although Fong also admits that both 'Qi' and 'Yun' can refer to the 'qualities of the depicted subject' or the 'personal, expressive characteristics of the artist'. His interpretation appears to offer valuable insights in terms of citing commentaries on 'Qi Yun' by several critics in the history of Chinese art.

According to Acker (1954, xxxiii/xlii), 'Qi Yun' is an ability of the painter. Although this could get support from the Song critic Guo Ruoxu (1080, ECTOP: 95–96) who appears to suggest that 'Qi Yun' originates in the painter's innate talent that reflects a man's disposition, Acker's opinion

merely refers to the painter's business of nourishing and controlling 'Qi', staying vibrant with 'Qi' during artistic creation, and finally demonstrating 'Qi' in the work. Guo Ruoxu (ca. 1080, ECTOP: 96) explicitly claimed that 'a painting must be complete in Qi Yun (spirit consonance) to be hailed as a treasure of the age'; otherwise, it is just 'common artisan's work', and it is actually not a painting in spite of being called a painting. Thus, 'Qi Yun' also appears to be the quality of a painting in Guo Ruoxu's mind, even though the ability to produce a painting complete with 'Qi Yun' is regarded by him to relate to the level of the painter's 'Qi Yun' as his innate talent or disposition. It is worth noting, however, that the mysterious connection between the painter and the work is obviously valuable, since the brush used by the Chinese painter could be regarded as 'an extension of [his] own body' and thus Chinese painting as brushwork 'projects a painter's physical movements' (Fong, 1992: 5).

According to Soper (1949: 422–423), since 'Qi Yun' is 'sympathetic responsiveness of the vital spirit', painters should guarantee that the spirit of the object depicted in the work would 'find and respond to its like' in the universe, so this claim seems to be providing an account of the aesthetic interaction between artist and object. Additionally, capturing the 'quintessential character' of the object and representing the essence of the object in the work as the aim of a painter appears convincing, although Soper wrongly confined 'Qi' in the scope of animate life. Following Soper's suggestion, it is not difficult to find that capturing the essence of the object has been emphasized as the unquestionable focus of Chinese painting. Before Xie He (active 500–535?), Gu Kaizhi (ca. 345–ca. 406) of the East Jin Dynasty once emphasized the significance of 'transmitting the spirit' (Chuan Shen) of the object in painting in one of his essays. It is said that Gu Kaizhi (ca. 345–ca. 406) drew the eyes after all the other parts were finished and his fame was based on his distinctive skill of transmitting spirit by drawing the eyes, which vividly reflected the necessity of transmitting spirit beyond form in painting. Transmitting spirit rather than merely depicting form is the most difficult challenge in figure painting, and the crux of transmitting spirit lies in the eyes, which are regarded to be uniquely capable of transmitting spirit most directly (Su Shi, 1037–1101, ECTOP: 225). Xie He's first law of 'spirit consonance engendering a sense of life' ('Qi Yun Sheng Dong'), which values 'Qi Yun' (spirit con-

sonance) over formal likeness seems to be a more advanced version of Gu Kaizhi's claim, and might draw on Gu Kaizhi's emphasis on transmitting spirit, although Xie He thought Gu Kaizhi's reputation on figure painting was overrated. Excellent paintings have the power of '[capturing] creation and [transmitting] quintessential spirit' and triggering observers' imagination to roam as if leading them to observe things 'on the spot' (*Xuan He Hua Pu*, 1120, ECTOP: 128). If a painting achieves formal likeness but lacks 'Qi Yun' (spirit consonance), it will not be judged as a good work or even as a failure. According to the Song critic Deng Chun (ca. 1167), it seems to be wrong that 'people merely know that human beings have spirit and do not realize that things have spirit', so he applauded Kuo Ruoxu's (ca. 1080) opinion that the painting which can only imitate form but cannot transmit spirit is nominally called a painting rather than a real artwork, and thus advocated 'Qi Yun Sheng Dong' (spirit consonance engendering a sense of life) as the first law of painting (ECTOP: 132). When talking about the standard of judging the quality of a painting, the Yuan critic Yang Weizhen (1296–1370) explicitly indicated that 'there is transmission of likeness or the transmission of spirit', and the latter is 'Qi Yun Sheng Dong', i.e. engendering a sense of life through spirit consonance (ECTOP: 246).

The emphasis on 'Qi Yun' (spirit consonance) in figure painting during the Six Dynasties might draw upon the praise of 'Qi Yun' (spirit consonance) in contemporary literary works such as *Shi Shuo Xin Yu*. The superiority, purity, and loftiness of 'Qi' as 'spirit' and the elegance, loveliness and attractiveness of 'Yun' as 'consonance' being reflected in individual personality or spirituality in terms of language style, personal manner and bearing were highly praised in *Shi Shuo Xin Yu*. By mainly exploring the notion of 'Qi' and 'Yun' being used in the fashion of remarking or identifying the personality or mentality of literati during the Six Dynasties recorded by *Shi Shuo Xin Yu*, Xu Fuguan (2001:89–108) concluded that the notion of 'Qi Yun' in figure painting of the Six Dynasties as the essential character of the object refers to the second nature of human beings as the object depicted, higher than the form as the first nature, and 'Qi' tends to be sublime and even masculine, while 'Yun' tends to be graceful and even feminine. The Tang critic Ouyang Jiong (896–971, ECTOP: 224) thought that 'if a painting has 'Qi Yun' (spirit consonance), but not formal likeness, then its

substance will dominate over its pattern; if it has formal likeness, but not 'Qi Yun' (spirit consonance), then it will be beautiful but not substantial'. According to Zhang Yanyuan (847, translated by Acker, 1954), works by the Tang figure painting master Wu Daozi are ranked as of the divine level (Shen Pin), and nobody before or after him could compete with him, since his skills seem to match all the six laws of Xie He, and his distinctiveness especially lies in being able to transmit 'Qi Yun' (spirit consonance) in the work. There is no extant work by Wu Daozi; it is only through reading the comments by his contemporary or later critics who saw his original work that we can imagine his distinctiveness. Although some works by the artists of the Tang Dynasty such as Zhang Xuan or Zhou Fang (active ca.780 – ca.810) are regarded as copies by later painters, 'Qi Yun' (spirit consonance) in their work could also be identified through looking at the copies. For example, in the work *Palace Ladies Wearing Floral Headdresses* which is attributed to Zhou Fang, the loneliness and boredom of the ladies in the court appear to be perfectly captured by Zhou Fang, beyond the representation of the details of costumes, coiffures, decorations, postures and actions. The painting seems to reflect the elegant but melancholy mood of the Tang poet Wang Changling (698–756): 'For all her jade-whiteness, she envies a crow/ Whose cold wings are kindled in the Court of the Bright Sun.'³

According to Soper (1949: 42?), 'Qi Yun' emphasizes on capturing the quintessential character of the object, and the quintessential character would be 'the horsiness of horses, the humanity of man', and 'on a more general level', might refer to 'the quickness of intelligence, the pulse of life'. Following this illustration, the first law of Xie He would seem to suggest painters must capture the perfect ideal (perhaps in the Platonic sense) rather than imitate the mere shadow of the perfect ideal world. However, the metaphysical ideal of Plato does not appear to be the pursuit of Chinese ancient artists, since the object of art is actual rather than metaphysical for them. Since the imitation of ideal reality or metaphys-

³ Composed by Wang Changling in *A Sigh in the Court of Perpetual Faith*. Translated by Witter Bynner (*The Jade Mountain*; New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1920). The beautiful visage (of the ladies in the court) could surpass the splendour of jade, but faded in beauty when compared with the colour of the crows carrying the shadow of sun when flying above the Court of the Bright Sun (Zhaoyang Palace, where the emperor lives).

ical idealism is not the first aim of Chinese painting in the pursuit of spirit consonance ('Qi Yun'), Chinese artists continuously explore ways in which to perceive, capture, and transmit 'Qi Yun', which appears to be the essence of the object beyond formal imitation. Jing Hao (870–930, ECTOP: 146/159) might be the first person to use 'Qi Yun' to comment on landscape painting: he recorded that the Tang master Zhang Zao (active 8th century) 'painted trees and rocks full of' 'Qi' (spirit) and 'Yun' (consonance), and the Tang painter Wang Wei's landscape paintings were praised for the transmission of 'noble and pure' 'Qi Yun' (spirit consonance); his claim of comparing reality (Zhen/Shi) with likeness (Si) or flowering (Hua) appears to imply that internal reality refers to 'Qi Yun', while formal likeness only refers to external appearance.⁴ According to Jing Hao (870–930, ECTOP: 146), a painter should grasp how to flower 'outward appearance from the outward appearance of the object' to attain 'lifelikeness', but also capture 'inner reality (Zhen/Shi) from the inner reality of the object', and should not take the 'outward appearance' as the 'inner reality'; if a painter did not understand this truth, he might attain 'lifelikeness but never achieve reality', and failing to convey spirit ('Qi') through the image will cause the image 'dead'. From his claims that 'lifelikeness means to achieve the form of the object but to leave out its spirit (Qi)' and 'reality means that both spirit (Qi) and substance are strong', it is clear that 'Qi' refers to internal reality, formal likeness refers to external appearance. Jing Hao (870–930, ECTOP: 171) also implied that 'Yun' (consonance) refers to internal reality when pointing out two types of faults in painting: the fault 'connected with form' and the fault 'not connected with form'. The former can be corrected by 'changing the forms', while the latter seems to be fatal since the absence of 'Qi' (spirit) and 'Yun' (consonance) will cause the painting to be 'dead image' or 'dead matter' which could not be improved by amending details in spite of the fact that the painter might be skilled at conveying formal likeness. Jing Hao (870–930, ECTOP: 170–171) divided four classes of painting (divine, sublime, distinctive and skilful): divine work and sublime work attain perfect achievement in grasping the 'outward appearance'

⁴ Jing Hao (870–930, ECTOP: 146) projected his six essentials of Chinese painting in a slightly different way from the six laws by Xie He: 'Qi' (spirit) is the first essential, 'Yun' (consonance) is the second, 'Si' (thought or idea) is the third, 'Jing' (scene) indicating formal likeness is the fourth, 'Bi' (brush) is the fifth, 'Mo' (Ink) is the sixth.

and 'inner nature' of objects; distinctive work appears to deviate from the 'real scene' through 'untrammelled and unexpected' brush; skilful work with 'minutiae of seductive beauty' loyally and diligently copies the outer appearance but neglects the internal reality, so it actually 'diverges from the true images', and only possesses 'an excessive outward beauty'. Lacking 'Qi Yun' (spirit consonance) appears to be a serious flaw for landscape painting. The Song landscape painting critic Han Zhuo (active ca. 1095–ca. 1125, ECTOP: 183) appears to inherit Jing Hao's theory in talking about the contrast between reality (Shi) and showiness (Hua) in painting: reality (Shi) 'connotes substance or corporeality', which is based on nature and 'originates in nature', and is essential due to nature being its basis, while showiness (Hua) 'connotes floweriness or ornamentation', being artificial and inessential since art is the application of nature. Here, essential reality actually refers to 'Qi Yun', inessential showiness resorts to formal likeness. Thus, Han Zhuo suggested painters to strive for 'Qi Yun' first, then formal likeness will be attained in the work 'as a matter of course'; when 'reality is insufficient', painters should stop painting, otherwise 'excessive showiness' will show up. According to Han Zhuo (active ca. 1095–ca. 1125, ECTOP: 184), for observers 'when examining paintings, the first thing to look for' is 'Qi Yun', and painters who grasp painting methods will 'comprehend the vitality of spiritual perfection, but those who study copying methods will possess the defects found in geography book illustrations'. That is, the most essential painting method for an artist is to grasp 'Qi Yun' (spirit consonance) rather than merely imitating form, otherwise the artist just produces geography book illustrations.

Besides Jing Hao's theory of reality, Loer's suggestion about 'Qi Yun' as the expressive quality or content of a work could be supported theoretically by the Han scholar Yang Xiong (53 BC – 18 AD) and the Tang painting master Zhang Zao (active about the late 8th century). Yang Xiong (53 BC – 18 AD) proposed 'word' as the 'sound of mind' and 'calligraphy' as the 'painting of mind', and suggested that people can identify a person to be a gentleman or a petty man according to his print of mind. As I explained earlier, although he related 'Qi Yun' to the innate talent of a painter, Guo Ruoxu explicitly indicated that 'Qi Yun' in the work as the quality of the work reflects the painter's mind. Following Yang Xiong's 'print of mind' metaphor, Guo Ruoxu (ca. 1080, ECTOP: 96) made an analogy between

painting and calligraphy, and suggested that painting is also 'mind-print', just like calligraphy '[originating] from the source of the mind', being 'perfected in the imagination', taking form 'as the traces of mind' on the surface of silk or paper, and becoming the 'print' 'in accord with the mind'; neither calligraphy nor painting can escape from reflecting 'the loftiness or baseness of spirit consonance'. The Tang master Zhang Zao (active about the late 8th century) located the secrets of art in that 'externally all creation is my master' and 'internally I have found the mind's sources' (Zhang Yanyuan, 847, ECTOP: 65). Not only is literature or calligraphy the print of mind, but mind is also the wellhead of painting, and painting is the image of mind. Similarly, the Song Scholar Wang Qinchun (about 1034–1101, ECTOP: 209) agreed that 'there is surely a single principle in literature, calligraphy, and painting'. Not only did art critics advocate this view of painting as the print of mind, but painters such as the North Song master Mi Youren (1075–1151, ECTOP: 205–206) also echoed Yang Xiong's insights and agreed that painting is 'a depiction of the mind'. To represent appears to be to express for Chinese painters, since painting as the print of mind originates from both nature and mind (Fong, 1986: 505).

Painting during the Song and Yuan Dynasties, especially landscape painting, verifies the notion of Qi Yun as the internal reality of the object and the expressive quality or content of the work beyond formal representation. In the examination of painting during Song and following Yuan, it can be seen that the aesthetic preference for internal spiritual reality rather than external materialistic reality and the tendency to favour expressionistic individuality or spirituality rather than formal representation have been inherited and developed by Song and Yuan painters, especially landscape painters. From the Song Dynasty onwards, scholars or literati started to dominate the leading direction of aesthetic taste in painting by engaging in artistic practice, and their emphasis on 'Qi Yun' enabled painting to function as a tool of self-expression beyond pictorial representation. Scholar-artists appear to arrive at a new high level in this enthusiastic pursuit and appreciation of 'Qi Yun' in painting, by advocating and practising painting as soundless poem with form that carries the subtle expression of poetic mood or lyric flavour. A poem is a painting without form and a painting is a poem with form' (Guo Xi, 1000–1090, ECTOP: 158). This idea is commonly attributed to the famous Tang poet and painter Wang

Wei (699? – 761?), whose artistic practice appears to have had enormous influence on Song and post-Song artists. ‘When one savours Wang Wei’s poems, there are paintings in them; when one looks at Wang Wei’s pictures, there are poems’ (Su Shi, 1037–1101, ECTOP: 203). Since painting is regarded as soundless poem, expressing the inexhaustible flavour and poetic mood is not only the aim of poets, but also the aim of Song and later painters. North Song critics and painters such as Guo Xi (1000–1090), Ouyang Xiu (1007–1072), Su Shi (1037–1101), Li Gonglin (1049–1105), Mi Fu (1052–1107), Chao Yuezhi (1059–1129), Mi Youren (1074–1151), and Han Zhuo (active 1095–1125) enthusiastically emphasized the aesthetic expression of poetic mood or lyric flavour in painting, and many of them successfully practised this preference on the poetic expressionism in their own artistic creation and heavily influenced later artists. Ouyang Xiu (1007–1072) suggested: ‘Loneliness and tranquillity are qualities difficult to paint and if an artist manages to achieve them, viewers are not always able to perceive this. Thus, birds’ or animals’ rates of speed are easy to see (in a painting), being things of superficial perception, while relaxed harmony and awesome stillness are hard to shape, as feelings of far-reaching mood’ (Ouyang Xiu, 1007–1072, ECTOP: 230–231). That is, if a painter could delineate the ‘loneliness and tranquillity’ of a landscape, and the ‘relaxed harmony and awesome stillness’ of flowers, plants, animals or human beings, that means he would be able to capture the profound mood of poetry, since loneliness, tranquillity, relaxed harmony and awesome stillness are expressive qualities ‘difficult to paint’.

Led by the expressionistic pursuit of ‘Qi Yun’ (spirit consonance) beyond formal representation, not only did painters throughout the Song and Yuan Dynasties engage in various methods and revolutionary styles, but also critics and connoisseurs from the scholar-officer class and the court got involved in the development of aesthetic practices. Whether it was the emotional landscape advocated by Guo Xi; or the scattering perspective of ‘six distances’ developed in North Song that contributes to the construction of the image of mind; or the one-corner composition favoured by South Song painters that enables painting to show the poetic introspection by leaving much blank space for aesthetic reflection both for artists and audiences; or painting interwoven with calligraphy and poetry becoming more and more popular from Song; or calligraphic brushes merging

into painting originated by Yuan painters; all of these practices continued to contribute into the expressive charisma of 'Qi Yun' (spirit consonance) beyond formal imitation, and to construct the unique aesthetic traits of Chinese painting.⁵ For instance, in the work *Evening in the Spring Hills* by an unidentified artist (mid-13th century), the trees growing on the cliff merely occupy little space in the right corner, and mountains, a pavilion and trees nearby also occupy little space at the bottom; three quarters of the space is blank except for a small moon in the top-left. If 'Qi' and 'Yun' could be respectively perceived as masculine sublime and feminine grace, the poetic mood and lingering flavour of 'Qi Yun', especially the graceful charm of 'Yun' shining through this work is much attributed to the blankness in the one-corner composition, which appears to stimulate the resonance of contemplation. The lingering flavour of this work also reminds of a comment on poetry by the influential Song poetry critic Yan Yu (ca. 1192–1245, translated by Bush, 2012: 44): 'Like an echo in the void, and colour in a form, the moon reflected in water, and an image in a mirror, the words come to an end, but the meaning is inexhaustible'.

Perhaps due to the importance of 'Qi Yun' (spirit consonance) as the

⁵ Guo Xi (1000–1090, ECTOP: 152) suggested painters should represent mountains thus: 'Spring mountains are gently seductive and seem to smile; summer mountains seem moist in their verdant hues; autumn mountains are bright and clear, arrayed in colourful garments; winter mountains are withdrawn in melancholy, apparently asleep'. *Early Spring* by Guo Xi vividly exemplifies the scenes of mountains in the early spring, and the sense of life and movement implied in this work makes it an excellent example of capturing 'Qi Yun' and expressing the genteel seductiveness and smiling face of the mountains in early spring. Guo Xi (ECTOP: 170; cited by Fang, 1992: 258) gave his original illustration of the three distances: 'high distance' (Gao Yuan) refers to 'from the bottom of the mountain looking up the top'; 'deep distance' (Shen Yuan) is from the front of the mountain peering into 'what lies behind'; 'level distance' (Ping Yuan) is 'from a nearby mountain looking past distant mountains'. Later Han Zhuo (active 1095–1125, ECTOP: 170; cited by Fang, 1992: 86), summarized another supplementary three distances: 'wide distance' or 'broad distance' (Kuo Yuan) is the viewing of a spacious sweep of far-reaching distant mountains from the nearby foreground shore of a wide stretch or broad expanse of water; 'lost distance' or 'hidden distance' (Mi Yuan) is the viewing of thick 'vast, hazy wilderness mists with running streams that intersect each other' and then seem to disappear; 'remote distance' or 'obscure distance' (You Yuan) is where scenery seems to be 'vagueness and mistiness' by 'becoming tiny and disappearing in space' when 'landscape elements diminish with distance'.

essential internal reality of the object depicted or the expressive quality of the work, there has been controversy among artists and critics on the issue of whether painters should strictly value external reality and meet the demand of formal likeness, especially from the North Song Dynasty, when more literati commonly got involved in artistic practices and despised the defects of artisans such as overly emphasizing details of formal likeness and neglecting the expression of spirit consonance. For example, Su Shi (1037–1101) wrote a famous poem which appears to criticize the defect of overly valuing resemblance: 'If anyone discusses painting in terms of formal likeness, /His understanding is close to that of a child. /If someone composing a poem must have a certain poem, /Then he is definitely not a man who knows poetry. /There is one basic rule in poetry and painting; /Natural genius and originality' (ECTOP: 224). Similarly to Su Shi's poem, 'if the idea is adequate, do not seek for outward likeness' is one sentence from a poem by the Song critic Chen Yuyi (1090–1138, cited by Tang Hou, active 1320–1330, ECTOP: 261), which has been echoed among the critics and painters of the Song and Yuan Dynasties, emphasizing the significance of spiritual expressionism. Following the way laid down by Zhao Mengfu (1254–1322), who called 'his creative process not as "painting" but as "writing"', Yuan masters appeared to care more about self-expression rather than loyally imitating reality (Hearn, 2014: 80). For instance, Ni Zan (1301–1374, ECTOP: 270/280) admitted his pleasure of painting lies in 'careless sketching' rather than carefully 'seeking formal likeness', and the expression and emancipation of the 'untrammelled spirit in [his] breast' when painting bamboos. It would not be hard to understand why Ni Zan liked to paint a grove of trees repetitively, or an empty pavilion on a foreground shore in a background of nearby water and distant mountains, since the expression of untrammelled spirit in the painter's breast merely needed a familiar outlet. The lingering flavour of blandness, tranquillity, isolation and detachment in the repetitive subject as emancipation of the 'untrammelled spirit' in his breast appears to mark his uniqueness, and his self-expression beyond representation is irresistibly attractive in the eyes of audiences. The poems written by Ni Zan on paintings might release the subtle differences in his mood at different times, and enhance the poetic favour of blandness, tranquillity, isolation and detachment reflected in painting. This relaxed flavour of isolation and detachment from worldly

affairs might be called 'relaxed nonchalance', which had been cherished by the elite of literati and artists in Chinese artistic history (Clunas, 2009: 136).

However, although Loehr's understanding of 'Qi Yun' as the expressive quality or content of the work can be verified by the paintings from the Six Dynasties to Yuan, he seems to make a mistake in only advocating that expressionism applies to paintings from the Yuan Dynasty. Due to both expressionistic qualities and representative elements in either Pre-Yuan art or Post-Song art, it would be hard to accept Loehr's (1970: 287–296) periodisation of Chinese painting, according to which 'a new, unprecedented, expressionistic art' suddenly and drastically sprang up in early Yuan, and subjective expressionism in Yuan art allegedly replaced objective realism in Song art.⁶

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, merely confining 'Qi Yun' to the scope of the painter, or the object, or the work appears to be unreasonable. During the process of creation by painters, 'Qi Yun' seems to refer to the essential character of the object, that is, the internal reality of the object. Once the painter releases the brush to complete a work, 'Qi Yun' becomes the expressive quality or content of the work. Confining it to a quality of the painter seems to be the most obviously partial approach, although it is undeniable that a painter should cultivate the ability to get in tune with the object, and capture 'Qi Yun', transmit it in the work, and release the image until a rapport is achieved. It also appears to be true that the expressionistic quality of a work reflects the innate talent and disposition of its painter. A painter should never seek formal likeness first, rather cultivate the image with a sense of life and naturalness in his mind, wait until the completed image suddenly and unconsciously appears in his mind, and then use his hand to respond to his mind and control the brush, so as to release the image and lodge the conception on paper or silk. 'Qi Yun', as the core concept of Chinese aesthetics, draws the painter, the object, the work, and the

⁶ I examine this issue with Loehr's periodisation of Chinese painting in my paper entitled 'Beyond Representation: Reconsidering Loehr's Periodisation of Chinese Painting' (presented at the 20th International Congress of Aesthetics, Seoul, 28 July 2016).

audience together, and promotes a fascinating interaction phenomenon among them.

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